

THE ALBERTA RURAL CHILD CARE PILOT PROJECT 1991-1992



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A report by:

The Alberta Women's Institutes

Women of Unifarm

Alberta Women in Support of Agriculture

Alberta Farm Women's Network



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The views expressed in this report are those of the project applicants and participants and the members of the project committee. This report is supported and advocated by the members of the Committee and the Farm Women's Organizations that they represent.

Agriculture, Community Development,
Alberta Home Improvement Branch, and
Marlene Johnson, Manager, Family
Dew Home Program, Alberta Family
and Social Services. Their support and
advice were invaluable.

Special thanks to a committee that
brought enthusiasm, personal
knowledge, commitment and co-
operation to every meeting.



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We especially wish to thank all the families who participated in the individual projects. Without their co-operation, evaluations, volunteer labor, communication skills and organizational ability none of this would have been possible.

We would also like to thank the dozens of people who asked for applications, the people who applied and were not accepted and the ones who wrote to us knowing that they were not eligible for the project but wanting to express their opinions and offer their support. You helped to verify the need for Rural Child Care in Alberta.

Our sincere thanks to: Shirley McClellan, Associate Minister of Agriculture, Shirley Myers, Head, Alberta Home Economics Branch, and Marlene Jubenvill, Manager, Family Day Home Program, Alberta Family and Social Services. Your support and advice were invaluable.

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Thanks to the Alberta Rural Women's groups who supported us and to their executive officers. They were: Holly Hallett - Alberta Women's Institutes, Elizabeth Olsen - Women of Unifarm, Martha Andrews/Marg Linklater - Alberta Women In Support of Agriculture, and Janet Walter - Alberta Farm Women's Network.

Special thanks to a committee that brought enthusiasm, personal knowledge, commitment and co-operation to every meeting.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the not so distant past when farm families were bigger and farm machinery was smaller a hired man was a normal part of the family. Often there was a hired woman too, certainly older children to help with the baby and maybe a live-in Grandma as well.

Those days are gone, Farmers can't afford a hired man, the equipment is too expensive and complex to trust to casual labor, if there are any older children they are in University, and Grandma and Grandpa are probably still running their own farm.

All this leaves a lot of gaps in the farm labor force and more and more of these gaps are being filled by farm women. The children go along or are left unsupervised.

The goal of the Alberta Rural Child Care Pilot Project was to plan, implement and evaluate a variety of child care demonstration projects that would meet the needs of farm families in Alberta. Our hope was first, that we could interest enough families in the project to make it representative and then, that the projects would be innovative and resourceful and we would learn something to pass on to other interested groups.

We feel that we have been successful. Interest was very high and requests for applications came from all over the

Province. Because we wanted the applicants to give us their ideas rather than conform to what they thought we expected, our application forms were deliberately ambiguous. We established a criteria for acceptance and no project that met our deadline and criteria was rejected. Our goal was 10 (ten) projects, we established 19 (nineteen). Fourteen (14) of them continue to function without our support.

We collected information from two Workshop Luncheons and the written evaluation that every participant was required to submit. From this information we conclude that Rural Child Care is possible, that the need for it is critical, that these needs vary greatly depending upon circumstances, and that no one method fits all situations.

In the body of our report we identify 8 (eight) project types but the edges blur somewhat and while no two projects were exactly alike, all of them share common traits. The projects that flourished were those with strong leadership, committed participants, a generous list of care givers, accessibility and a realistic budget. Our most viable projects and several of those that continue on their own are the ones that moved into areas besides child care; support groups, safety workshops, parenting clinics, study groups and social interaction.



This report recommends that:

1. Child care be recognized as a necessary part of rural life;
2. The Department of Agriculture and the Alberta Home Economics Branch make a concerted effort to teach farm families that child care is necessary, possible and affordable;
3. Incentives be offered to Community Service groups that make rural child care a priority;
4. More flexibility be allowed in regard to rural facility regulations;
5. The Department of Agriculture promote ways and means by which farm families can obtain child care tax credits.

Rural Child Care is a need that must be addressed. With the ingenuity, and resourcefulness of our farm community this can be accomplished with minimal Government assistance in the form of advice and suggested programs. It requires great commitment and the dedicated involvement of the users. We have shown that this too is possible.



INTRODUCTION

On April 17, 1991 the Associate Minister of Agriculture, Shirley McClellan, announced that Agricultural Initiatives Funds, provided by the Alberta Lottery Fund, would provide financial support to the Alberta Women's Institutes to administer a program to implement and evaluate a variety of child care projects in rural Alberta.

The executive of Alberta Women's Institutes, in consultation with the presidents of four other Alberta rural women's groups, planned a committee to oversee the program. They appointed to this committee, two A.W.I. members as non-voting chairman and secretary treasurer, and four voting members representing Alberta Women's Institutes, Women of Unifarm, Alberta Women in Support of Agriculture and Alberta Farm Women's Network. This committee and the group Presidents met in Edmonton May 2, 1991 for a planning session to launch the project. Subsequent meetings involved committee members only.

The project began with press releases and the design and distribution of brochures. Response to the brochures was very good, with about 130 requests for applications from all over the Province. Application forms were mailed in response to every request.

A criteria was established for accepting projects and the committee tried to choose those that had the highest likelihood of continuing when our assistance ceased. Seven projects were accepted for the fall session, July to December 1991, and twelve projects for spring, January to June 1992.

Subsidy was paid at 65% of child care costs to a maximum of \$4.00 per hour per family and payment was made at the close of the project and after receipt of signed time sheets and the user's evaluation.

The purpose of this project was to plan, implement and evaluate a variety of child care demonstration projects that would meet the needs of farm families in Alberta. This report is a condensation of the observations, evaluations, achievements and failures that the 19 projects encountered during the test period. The report will discuss needs, purpose and benefits, of rural child care, costs, types of projects and some suggestions and recommendations for implementing them.

There will also be a section for observations, recommendations and quotes from individual participants who hold common views.



PURPOSE

As the need for rural child care has been well established, our group did not actively attempt to collect further documentation in this area, however, some information must be offered to clarify the reasons for this project.

Farm families deal with seasonal work, odd hours, peak times, emergency situations and long or short days, depending upon weather conditions. Add to this huge, complicated, expensive machinery, unpredictable large animals and a declining farm income that makes hiring help almost impossible, and we have more and more mothers in the farm labor force and more and more children at risk. Established Day Care Homes must plan for the number of children that will be with them on a regular basis and for regular hours. If the established Day Care is 40 miles away from the farm and the grain is ready to combine at 7:30 p.m., or a cow is calving at 5:30 on Sunday morning, the farm child will have to be in the field or in the barn.

The purpose of this project was to implement a variety of child care programs whose operation would provide information that might help other farm families with similar needs.

We offered only partial funding, payable at the close of the project, because we wanted to encourage the participation of people who were willing to keep good records and write a full evaluation.

We hoped that the various projects would have the help and support of their communities. In this we were somewhat disappointed.

Although our primary goal was to provide a safe environment for children stress relief for parents was a consideration as was the children's socialization.

A very welcome benefit, and one that we had not foreseen, was the emotional and social support that the parents were able to give each other within the organized groups.



PLANNING AND ORGANIZING

We began the project by designing and distributing brochures¹. The brochures went to individual chapters of the supporting groups and to their newsletter editors, the Provincial conventions of the supporting groups, all District Home Economists offices, all Family and Community Support Service offices, and many Health Units, Agricultural Societies, Church Groups and School offices. We paid for news releases through the Alberta Weekly Newspaper Association and had excellent coverage through the Western Producer and the Alberta Farm and Ranch magazine. Stories also appeared Province wide in Newspapers and magazines. Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Camrose and Red Deer Radio Stations did interviews as did C.B.C. Wild Rose Country from both Edmonton and Calgary. We had T.V. coverage from Red Deer, Calgary, and Edmonton.

About 130 requests for applications were received. They were from all over the Province and application forms were mailed to each of them.

Application Forms

Application forms² were deliberately ambiguous because we wanted the applicants to give us their ideas rather than try to conform to what they

thought we expected. The percentage of completed and returned applications was approximately 30%. No application that met our deadline and criteria was rejected.

Criteria

All projects were restricted to child care on farms. No employee benefits were paid and no subsidy was given to full-time or live-in help or to help currently under the umbrella of an existing program. Only parents working "on farm" were considered. Community involvement was a consideration as were unique approaches, sound planning, clear objectives and details on administration.

Care Givers' Qualifications

Care givers' qualifications were the responsibility of the user but each was advised that assistance in this area was available from Alberta Family Day Care Programs.

Subsidy

Subsidy was paid at 65% of child care costs to a maximum of \$4.00 per hour per family.

1. See Appendix 1

2. See Appendix 2



Our Goal, Ten Projects

Our original goal was for ten projects, but when we discovered how modest some of the requests were we found that we had funds to cover 19 (nineteen)³. Seven of these were for the Fall Season, July to December 1991. Twelve were Spring projects, January to June 1992. Fall projects included 19 families and 43 children. Spring projects served 44 families and 106 children. This totals 63 families and 149 children. There is some minor overlap because 2 of the Fall projects reorganized, added participants and qualified for Spring. The project size varied but an average unit involved 3 to 5 families and 9 to 12 children. Fourteen of the nineteen projects continue to function without our financial assistance.

Participants' Responsibility

Participants' responsibility was to keep accurate records of hours and wages and, at the close of their project, to present signed time sheets and a written evaluation. No subsidy was paid until this requirement was met. Successful luncheons and workshops were held after each project period thus offering the participants a chance to exchange ideas and concerns.

Information and Statistics

Information and statistics from the evaluations.

19	Projects
63	Families
149	Children

Participants were from many types of farms. There were mixed farms (livestock and grain), mixed grain, commercial cattle, purebred cattle, hogs, poultry, vegetables, hay, dairy, hydroponic vegetables, sheep and cow/calf operations.

Twelve projects came in substantially under budget. Six projects were on budget or very slightly below. One project did not materialize and received no funding. No project asked for, or received, more than originally allotted.

Community Support

Many organizations were verbally supportive but offered no deeper commitment. In this category were, Agricultural Societies, Recreation Boards, Women's Groups, Health Units, Town Offices, Local Day Care Centres, Hire-A-Student and School Divisions. There were exceptions in one or two FCSS (Family and Community Support Services) organizations, and some of the District Home Economists.

3. See Appendix 3



PROJECT TYPES

Child Care Sharing...a 2 or 3 family project with parents who took turns taking all the children of both families on designated days.

Central Registry 1...One programmer keeps the list of available care givers, the times that they are available, preferences as to travelling distance, etc. The person needing child care calls the programmer and is connected with available sitters.

Central Registry 2...a 2 or 3 family project with lists posted in all homes.

Limited Registry...a 2 family project using mostly relatives.

Irregular or Emergency Drop Off with One Care Giver...several families share a care giver who has facilities to keep children on an irregular basis.

Care Giver Registry...a large project, 6 families. Each party has a list in 3 sections:

1. Personal, for use of individual
e.g. Grandma;
2. General, neighbors who will take children into their homes;
3. Students, with transportation, who will come to your farm after school and weekends.

Sharing a Care Giver...Hiring a College student between 2 neighbors for the summer months. The student takes turns so that children are at home half time. During the school year and with the co-operation of the School Board, High School age Care givers get off the bus at the participants home.

Isolated Areas...shared between taking children to only neighbor 7 miles away or hiring Grandma (who drove 80 miles) on weekends. Alternated between only 2 available neighbors, hired grandpa.

Some projects used a combination of the above. Other approaches used on a limited basis were, barter system, e.g. a bag of oats for an hour of baby-sitting, baking or running errands for baby-sitting and when a parent and child came in to baby-sit for a full day their meals were considered when deciding payment.



PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS

Project effectiveness as evaluated by participants.

Child Care Sharing seems to work quite well as long as the participants have very similar schedules and needs. If however, one of the users needs 30 hours per week while a neighbor needs only 4, resentment builds and some other way must be found to make the arrangement fair. One method is to bank hours and keep a record of how many hours you have in the time bank. Another is to limit the number of hours per week any member may use and beyond that the hours are paid for in cash.

Central Registries 1 and 2 and Limited Registry are quite effective and reasonably trouble free as long as the organizers are able to maintain a list of several dependable care givers.

Irregular or Emergency Drop Off with One Care Giver. This project began with great enthusiasm and high hopes because they had found the perfect person to care for their children. She was flexible, caring and dependable. Unfortunately her husband was transferred and the whole project foundered because it had been based upon the availability of one person.

Care Giver Registry, this was one of the most effective projects and there seemed to be several reasons why it functioned so well. The organizers kept up an extensive list in 3 sections (Personal, General, Students) and they formed a support group that met on a regular basis.

Sharing a Care Giver, e.g. a University student worked very well for a 2 family, summer, project.

Isolated Areas offer unique problems and the user must simply make do with what is available. All too often help is many miles away and a casual baby-sitter is an unattainable luxury.



TYPE OF CARE GIVER

Care givers depended almost exclusively upon who was available. This included neighbors, University students, High School students and relatives. Very often it was a Grandma who might have kept the children anyway but by being able to pay her even a small amount Grandma was able to feel that she was needed and appreciated and the parents were able to feel that they were not taking advantage of her. Under these circumstances the parents were more likely to ask for help and the children benefited.

BUDGET

Lowest rate paid was \$2.00 per hour,
Highest \$6.15.

Rate most commonly used was:

1	child	\$3.00
2	children	\$4.00
3	children	\$5.00

Participants paying \$2.00 per hour found it very difficult to get care givers. Those who set the rate at \$6.15 did so in order to get maximum subsidy. A mid-range at \$3, \$4 and \$5 was satisfactory to most.



SUGGESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM PARTICIPATING PARENTS

"The project was a huge benefit to our farming operation. Biggest difference was in my husband's temperament, "as he is usually irritable and worried about how he will get things done but this year he is more relaxed about not having to hire out the work."

"I felt the project made more of a difference psychologically than physically. Just knowing that help was available and affordable relieved stress and having the support of other mothers was great." Grateful to know that kids were not being exposed to farm hazards. Affordable child care allowed both parents to participate in farm work thus increasing farm production and efficiency while reducing labor expenses. A few hard workers in the group kept it running, others were simply participants.

"Some of the families who needed this most were the least likely to participate. They did not have time to keep up the paperwork, plan ahead or organize. Some of the most cash strapped who really need support had one or both parents working off farm so didn't fit the program. I would like to see child care tax credits available to farm families below a certain income. I do not feel that a rural child care project should be set up through public funding."

"Greatest success of the program was knowing children were safe and not sleeping on the ledge of a tractor."

"I felt I was contributing to the family's livelihood and the kids were safer and happier. It is economically more practical to have wives assist during busy times and emergencies."

Group meetings gave mothers a chance to escape for a couple of hours, to relax and share similar experiences with others. "We need more of these fun and comforting times together." Frequently phoned each other in the evening just to talk with someone. " The primary organizer worked very hard to make this project work."

"Felt less pressure to be "super mom" and kids benefited from someone with time for tea parties, mud pies, picking saskatoons." All possible because of hiring a child care person and not feeling like ..." we were spending more money than we had available."

Project took a stressful situation and turned it into a happy time, had less breakdowns and accomplished more. Child was happy and relaxed, everyone benefited, husband, child, baby-sitter, mom.

"All farm women need support, even those forced to work off farm. Tax credit for child care would be most beneficial and replace subsidies. Cost of child care was approximately 1% of our total farm expenses."



Less stress, able to do without hired man whose care with machinery is never as great as ones' own. Supported each other and felt luncheon/workshop was valuable for support and ideas. Worked hard to maintain project and without co-operation it would have fallen apart.

FCSS member sat in on projects and offered most support. Some criticism from older farm women, "raised our kids alone why can't you."

Have had a Farm Equipment Clinic, Occupational Health and Safety speaker, Combine Safety Clinic and have had or plan First Aid, CPR and other courses. Feel their family life and marital relations have benefited greatly and many of them have grown in organizational, communication and social ability since they began meeting. More confidence in themselves, husbands have more confidence in them.

"Funding for this type of project could be made available from Farm Equipment companies, Agriculture based companies, e.g. herbicide and insecticide manufacturers, Grain Companies, UFA..."

"No hired man in the house and no extra person to cook and clean for. It gave us back our privacy. Less breakdowns because we have more respect for the machines than an employee has."

"Some people think that every farm family has a grandma or an aunt close by. We live about 100 miles from our closest relatives."

"Urban population should know that child care is as much a necessity and reality to rural family life as it is to urban family life."

Disappointed in lack of support and interest from FCSS and DHE. No negative comments from community, "not many people would say that a child's safety is not important." Definitely enhanced family life, less stress and uncertainty, able to concentrate with no distractions or worries." My husband felt better about asking me to help knowing I didn't have to drag the kids along or leave them unattended. No two farm operations are the same so what works for one won't work for another. Child care on the farm puts me in control of the situation rather than the situation controlling me."

There is another group of parents that need assistance. Women working off the farm to help pay for the land or just to keep the operation afloat. "Their work is as important to the farm as is mine. Perhaps a tax credit or some other form of tax assistance would be worth looking into."

"You only have to sit on a piece of machinery for one day with little ones crying and nagging to go home to know that this project was worth every penny and every ounce of work."



THE PROJECT THAT FAILED

It may be useful to examine the project that failed. When the committee chose Spring Projects we gave this one full marks. They had plans to continue when our support ceased, "we hope to participate in joint fund raisers (with Agriculture Society) such as dances, suppers, bingos, etc. and use the proceeds for child care." They planned farm safety courses, CPR for wives etc.. They had a permanent room fully equipped to accommodate 30 children in the basement of the Agriculture Society Hall 25 miles Northwest of town. They had been in operation and self supporting for three years as, "a rural indoor playground to enable our rural children to interact with their peers before entering into the school system." They had 2 care givers who were also program co-ordinators.

As a rural indoor playground their hours had been standard and predictable. When they tried to make the transition to rural child care they found that the odd hours and unpredictable number of children did not work under the same format. The care givers could not cope with these odd hours and the unpredictable number of children. The parents found that taking the kids to the hall along with food and provisions used too much valuable time. The letter that we finally received reads in part.

"The only way of helping farm families with young children would be to make looking after children and household work so it would be tax deductible the same way a hired man would be. I feel that the project would only work with a sitter to come in. If I am running the kids to some place else I still have lunches, laundry etc. I don't end up being of that much assistance in the field work. To take the time to run the kids to a centre 5 or 10 miles away was a waste of valuable time. It's very hard to hire someone to work hours that we would recommend. Some farmer would be done, it might rain or crop would not be ready so we would be hiring a sitter for only 2 children some days and other days we would have 10 children so then we would have to take the time to look for 2 sitters."



CONCLUSIONS

Because of the interest shown in this project, the high number of requests for applications, and the number of actual projects implemented we feel assured that Alberta farm families are ready to invest in a child care system.

Their responses, also demonstrate once again, the desperate need for farm child care. Some heartbreaking stories were brought to our attention.

Rural child care needs are different than those of urban families. The needs, in fact, vary from farm to farm and between areas in the Province. The mother who has several close neighbors with small children should have no difficulty in finding friends sympathetic to her cause. Families who live near a town or village should be able to set up a central drop off, but the only young family in an isolated area may have no resources at all.

This project has demonstrated that rural child care is difficult but not impossible, less costly than expected, and beneficial to parents, children, care givers and the farm operation. Our participants have demonstrated innovation, ingenuity and resourcefulness. In many cases the participating parents have grown in confidence, and in organizational and communication skills that will enable them to address the situation even after the project ends. We have no way of knowing whether the project saved the lives of any children but we know that many children were happier and safer because of it.

An unexpected but very gratifying benefit has been the parents's great appreciation for the emotional and social support found within the organized groups.

While project types will vary depending upon the differences in geography and population some factors will have to remain constant. The projects that flourished were those with strong leadership, committed participants, a generous list of care givers, accessibility, and a realistic budget. Because needs are seasonal the input level will fluctuate but the infrastructure should remain in place year round. Our most viable projects also radiated into other areas, e.g. safety workshops, farm equipment clinics, parenting clinics, study groups, and social interaction. The support of interagencies such as FCSS and DHEs can be valuable. Established Farm Women's groups should be prepared to offer their support and encouragement.

Many participants expressed opinions regarding child care tax credits being made available to farm families below a certain income, or "make looking after children and household work so it would be tax deductible the same way a hired man would be." Especially in isolated areas the only way to have dependable care givers is to have "live-in" during peak periods and without some tax break this is more than most farm families can afford.



CONCLUSIONS

Another recommendation was that during periods when the work of both parents is required for the operation of the farm the resulting cost of child care should be allowed as direct costs of operating the farm. We also had participants who felt strongly that no rural child care project should be set up through public funds and with equitable tax adjustments this could be accomplished.

It is also worth mentioning that one of our projects wished to continue but had difficulty with the regulations for daycare centres in Alberta. They had found a caring person, willing to take children into her home at odd hours and peak periods and applied for a licence only to be told that the home did not meet standards. No one advocates lowering standards but, where it is impossible to comply and the home is clean and safe, some flexibility should be allowed.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of the information and conclusions gleaned from this project the Committee makes the following recommendations:

1. That child care be recognized as as much a necessity and reality to rural family life as it is to urban family life.
2. That the Department of Agriculture and the Alberta Home Economics Branch make a concentrated effort to teach farm families that child care is necessary, possible and affordable.
3. That the Alberta Home Economics Branch be the primary distributor of the information needed to establish child care projects and then act as advisor to these projects.
4. That incentives be offered to FCSS programs that make rural child care a priority.
5. That the Alberta Department of Agriculture promote ways and means by which farm families (and all stay at home parents) can obtain child care tax credits.
6. That more flexibility be allowed in regard to facility regulations in a rural day care environment. Perhaps each case could be judged by a panel of advisors.
7. That established Women's Groups make a concentrated effort to support and encourage young farm families and all rural child care projects.
8. That a committee of representatives from the involved women's groups implement further child care projects in Alberta. That this committee utilize the information and resources gained from the pilot projects, be answerable to a Government agency, and fund resource persons who go into the community to help and advise interested groups.
9. That The Alberta Farm Safety Program be commended for the work they have done on behalf of Alberta's Farm Children.

APPENDIX 1



Alberta Rural Childcare Pilot Project Committee

APPLICATION FORM.....

Name..... Address.....

Postal Code..... Phone Number.....

Location of Project.....

Anticipated beginning date.....Ant. end. date.....

Number of days or hours per week; daily.....weekly.....

one day a week..... varying.....

Proposed # of families involved.....# of children involved.....

Type of farming operation.....

Why your situation requires on farm child care.....

.....

Budget Breakdown; income.....

expenses.....

Who will participate; individuals, organizations, volunteers
etc.....

.....

.....

Details of proposed project, please write a full and explicit description
e.g. child care sharing, central registry for care givers, others. Use the
back of this sheet or attach your own.

How do you foresee this project functioning after our support ceases?.....

.....

signature.....date.....

Please send this application to the nearest address on the following list.

Chairman: Noreen Olson, RR#2 Carstairs Ab. TOM ONO,	337-2037
Sec-Treas: Win Waters, RR#3 Innisfail Ab. TOM 1A0,	227-2004
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APPENDIX 2

for information contact

Alberta Rural Child Care Pilot Project
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ALBERTA RURAL CHILD CARE PILOT PROJECT



SPONSORED BY

Alberta Women's Institutes
Women of Unifarm
Alberta Women in Support of Agriculture
Alberta Farm Women's Network

FUNDED BY

Alberta Agricultural Initiatives Program

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

To gather information and develop necessary programs that will help farming and rural people find practical solutions to their child care needs.

To Implement and evaluate a variety of Child Care Projects in Rural Alberta which with the support of the involved community organizations will continue to function after our support ceases.

To draw upon established organizations e.g. F.C.S.S. and District Home Economists to help us form a registry of willing child care workers.

Are you a rural parent in need of child care on a seasonal, part-time or occasional basis?

If so, will you and some of your friends and neighbors help us to organize a rural child care project which will serve your needs and be funded in part by Alberta Agricultural Initiatives?

A limited number of projects will be accepted and preference will be given to the earliest applications as funding is limited.

Upon completion of each project, evaluation will be required to assess its effectiveness.

For further information return the attached form.



APPENDIX 3



